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AUTHOR Sheldon, Mary: Ramakrishnan, Kollengode R.
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ABSTRACT

Viewing illegitimacy from an individualist, deviant behavior frame of reference has not been useful because of the high prevalence of illegitimacy. Theories attributing illegitimacy to the social marginality of subcultures are inadequate to explain illegitimacy among working class and middle class children. Theories based on the notion that mothers of illegitimate infants are mature women do not explain illegitimacy among teenagers. Analysis of current research indicates that pregnancy is occurring among teenagers because sociocultural factors pressure them into making decisions that require a more mature level of moral judgment than they possess. Preventive measures regarding illegitimacy should be based on theories of normal psychosocial adolescent development that include socialization experiences for persons at a given level of cognitive and moral development in the context of a heterogeneous society. (Author/HLM)

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TEENAGE PREGNANCY AND TEENAGE ILLEGITIMACY: A RECONSIDERATION OF THEORIES OF ILLEGITIMACY

Mary Sheldon
West Texas State University

Kollengode R. Ramakrishnan
West Texas State University
Canyon, Texas

U S DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION

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INTRODUCTION

In recent years the subject of illegitimacy has taken on a new importance and a new urgency, the reasons for this being many. The number of illegitimate births has increased, although recently the illegitimacy rate has decreased slightly. The proportion of all births that are illegitimate has increased. Also, the proportion of illegitimate children born to teenage mothers brings into question theories of illegitimacy based on social marginality. In late years health professionals have become increasingly aware of the physical consequences for the child born to a teenage mother as well as the physical and psychological consequences for the mother.

This paper documents the increased numbers of infants born to teenage unwed mothers, discusses some of the reasons for this phenomenon, and suggests a need for a new theoretical perspective.

PREVALENCE OF ILLEGITIMACY

Contrary to popular beliefs, premarital sex and pregnancy have been rather common phenomena in Western society. In most of Europe, for centuries pregnancy was a common premarital condition, and illegitimacy was also common (Goode, 1964). Premarital pregnancy was the usual condition leading to early marriage, especially in Scandinavian countries, with one-third or more of all first births occurring within seven calendar months of marriage (Monahan, 1960). Burchinal (1965) notes that in the United States rates of young people who married increased consistently from 1910 through 1950, with an estimated one-third to one-half of these young marriages involving

premarital pregnancies. However, in the United States early childbearing has never been socially accepted, and the trend has been for the states to raise the age of legal marriage whether or not the parents gave their consent.

According to Furstenberg (1976), early childbearing in the United States was rare, and the birth rate among young women between fifteen and nineteen remained essentially unchanged until the end of World War II, fluctuating between 50 and 60 births per 1,000 teenage women. Since World War II birth rates have climbed from 51 per 1,000 teenage women in 1945 to 97.3 per 1,000 by 1957, the peak year of the baby boom (Baldwin, 1976). Since then there has been a steady decline in the rate of births to teenage women concomitant with the decline in the total birth rate. The decline in the birth rate has been more characteristic of older women (age twenty and over) than of younger ones. Nevertheless, the teenage birth rate was 64.7 in 1971, 58.1 in 1974, 53.5 in 1976, and 53.7 in 1977. The birth rate for women age sixteen and younger rose slightly during these years (Baldwin, 1976). According to Stencel (1979), teenagers now account for one in every five births in the country.

Until recently, illegitimacy rates in the United States have been quite low compared to those of Northwest Europe. It is only since 1965 that illegitimacy rates in the United States have exceeded those of England. The existing statistics indicate that illegitimacy rates among blacks have been higher than those among whites. Between 1920 and 1970 the overall illegitimacy rate increased from 8.7 to 26.4, while the white illegitimacy rate increased from 4.4 to 13.9, and the black illegitimacy rate increased from 41.5 to 95.5. (See Table 1.) In recent years the gap between black and

white illegitimacy rates has been somewhat narrowing because overall black illegitimacy rates are declining, being 84.5 in 1977.

Until 1970 teenage illegitimacy rates were always lower than those for women age twenty and over for both both whites and blacks. Since 1970 the black teenage illegitimacy rate has been higher than that of all black women. (See Table 1.) In 1977 the teenage illegitimacy rate was 13.6 for whites and 93.2 for blacks. The gain in nonwhite teenage illegitimacy rates between 1960 and 1977 has come mainly from young women giving birth at age seventeen and younger. (See Table 2.) (However, between 1976 and 1977, the nonmarital birthrate for black women age 15-17 dropped somewhat.) The proportion of children born out of wedlock is up since 1960 for both nonwhite and white teenage girls, but remains much higher for nonwhites than for whites. In 1977, the latest year for which statistics are available, one in four babies born to white teenagers, and four in five babies born to nonwhite teenagers were illegitimate. (See Table 3.) Although the nonwhite teenage illegitimacy rate remains much higher than the white illegitimacy rate, white teens gave birth to almost forty-five percent of all illegitimate babies.

During the 1970's, the phenomenon of illegitimacy has changed so much so as to render many of the theories inadequate to explain current statistics. The total number of illegitimate births continues to increase and almost half of these births are to teenagers. In summary, about one million teenagers become pregnant every year (Stencel, 1979). After abortions, miscarriages, and stillbirths, there are about 600,000 live births to teenagers. About forty percent or 240,000 of these infants are illegitimate, yet only eight percent of the mothers place these infants for adoption.

Table 1. Estimated Illegitimacy Rates
By Age and Race of Mother
United States: 1940-1977

Race and Age of Mother	1940	1950	1960	1970	1977
All Races					
all ages, 15-44 years	8.0	14.5	21.7	26.4	26.0
teens, 15-19 years	8.7	13.6	16.4	22.4	25.5
Whites					
all ages, 15-44 years	3.9	6.1	9.3	13.9	13.7
teens, 15-19 years	3.6	5.3	6.9	10.9	13.6
Blacks					
all ages, 15-44 years	39.1	68.9	90.2	95.5	84.5
teens, 15-19 years	48.4	69.8	78.5	96.9	93.2

Sources: For 1940-1960, Phillips Cutright, "Illegitimacy in the United States" in Westoff and Parke (eds.) Demographic and Social Aspects of Population Growth, U.S. Govt., Washington, D. C. 1972; p. 384.

For 1970, Vital and Health Statistics, NCHS, series 21, No. 30, Sept. 1978.

For 1977, Monthly Vital Statistics Report, NCHS, Vol. 27, No. 11, Supplement, 1979, "Advance Report: Final Natality Statistics, 1977."

Table 2. Illegitimacy Rates to Women under 20, by Race. United States: 1940-1977.

Race and Age of Mother	1940	1950	1960	1968	1977
Nonwhite*					
14 years	13	19	20	21	na
15-17 years	38	53	56	67	69
18-19 years	61	93	114	112	117
Total, 15-19	46	66	74	82	86
White					
14 years	0.5	0.8	1	1	na
15-17 years	2	3	4	6	11
18-19 years	5	8	12	17	19
Total, 15-19	4	5	7	10	14

Sources: For 1940-1968, Phillips Cutright, "Illegitimacy in the United States," in Westoff and Parke (eds.), Demographic and Social Aspects of Population Growth, U.S. Govt., Washington, D. C., 1972, p. 385

For 1977, Monthly Vital Statistics Report, NCHS, Vol. 27, No. 11, Supplement, 1979, "Advance Report: Final Natality Statistics, 1977."

*includes blacks plus other nonwhites.

Table 3. Numbers and Ratios of Illegitimate Births to Teenage Mothers, by Age and Race of Mother

Age of Mother	Number			Ratio Illegitimate/1000 Live Births		
	All Races	White	All Other	All Races	White	All Other
Under 15	10,100	3,400	6,700	882	728	988
15	23,000	9,500	13,400	743	562	953
16	42,400	18,900	23,500	605	429	905
17	55,500	25,400	30,200	492	329	850
18	60,800	27,500	33,300	396	250	765
19	57,900	25,700	32,200	302	179	673
Total, 15-19	239,700	107,100	132,600	429	273	794

Source: "Advance Report: Final Natality Statistics, 1977." Monthly Vital Statistics Report, NCHS, Vol. 27, No. 11, Supplement, 1979

FACTORS RELATED TO TEENAGE ILLEGITIMACY

Explaining the rise in teenage illegitimacy rates in the face of generally lower birth rates for all women, and in the face of generally declining rates of illegitimacy among all women requires a probing analysis. A few of the more obviously related phenomena have been discussed in the professional literature. Among those causes that have been attributed to the rise in the teenage illegitimacy rates are: increased sexual activity of teenagers, sexual and contraceptive ignorance, unwillingness to use contraceptives, unwillingness to abort, and an inability or an unwillingness to marry in order to legitimate the child. The illegitimacy rates would be even higher if the older teenagers did not have knowledge of sex and contraception, a willingness to use contraception, and if necessary, a willingness to abort.

It would seem obvious that sexual activity has risen among teenagers. Cannon and Long (1971), reviewing the literature on the subject, notice an increase in sexual activity among teenage girls since 1900. Examining trends in premarital coitus by cohort analysis of black and white women living in sixteen United States cities, Udry et al. (1975) find an increase in premarital coitus for each successive cohort, with the most rapid increase in the late 1960's for those fifteen to nineteen. However, lower rates of premarital sex prevailed among whites than among blacks for all cohorts. Vener and Stewart (1975) have studied a sample of junior and senior high school students in a white middle class, non-metropolitan community and report an increase in premarital coitus from sixteen to twenty-two percent from 1970 to 1973. Also, Zelnik and Kantner (1977) have found that the prevalence of sexual activity between 1971 and 1976 among never-married teenage girls had increased

by thirty percent, so that in 1976, by age nineteen fifty-five percent of the girls had had sexual intercourse. The increase in sexual activity occurred at all ages and among all races.

There probably would be even higher illegitimacy rates now if it were not for the increasing use of contraceptives. Zelnik and Kantner (1977) not only report an increase in the use of contraceptives from 1971 to 1976, but also show that the trend has been from the use of the less effective contraceptives to the use of the more effective contraceptives. However, in 1971 there was a gap between the first intercourse and the first use of contraception, and this gap has not narrowed. While the sexual activity of teenagers is sporadic, their use of contraceptives tends to be "never" or "only occasionally." Those who delay contraception are, of course, much more likely to get pregnant than those who do not.

A high level of sexual misinformation and ignorance about sex and pregnancy continues to exist. While sexually experienced whites seem to be informed about sex and the risks of pregnancy, misinformation among blacks is widespread and bears little relationship to sexual experience or to age. This dearth of information among black young women should be a major subject of research, because sociologists find it difficult to explain why the women are uninformed in this area. Even folk cultures have knowledge and folklore about pregnancy and childbirth, so why are black teenagers so uninformed? Practical solutions to illegitimacy among black teenagers cannot succeed without this research. Blacks seem to accept sexual intercourse as a good and natural outcome of a relationship between a man and a woman. While they wish for their children to marry before pregnancies occur, they accept illegitimate children. This is partly because of the recency of their rural

based social customs and the ability of the extended family network to provide care for the infants and mothers, an ability often less present in an urban environment (Martin and Martin, 1978). Another consideration is that as urban proletariats and sub-proletariats, their social conservatism is a barrier to sex education within the family. Thus it is familial conservatism rather than sexual promiscuity that helps to produce illegitimacy among blacks.

Since the legalization of abortion, abortion may have replaced both marriage and adoption as a form of resolution for many out-of-wedlock pregnancies. In California in the year 1968-1969, there were 3.6 abortions per 1,000 unmarried women, but in the year 1971-1972, there were 45.4 abortions per 1,000 unmarried women (Sklar and Berkov, 1973). In those same years there was a decline in overall fertility and a decline in the illegitimate birth rates. However, illegitimate birth rates declined less than legitimate birth rates. Sklar and Berkov conclude: "The failure of the 1972 illegitimate birth rate to continue its rapid decline of the previous year, the tendency of illegitimacy to remain at a fairly high level, and the startling rise in illegitimacy among white teenagers suggest that, despite the availability of legal abortion, many women are deliberately choosing unwed motherhood."

Further, in regards to abortion, Baldwin (1976) states that ". . . although the total number of legal abortions rose from 1972 to 1974, the proportion of abortions performed on adolescents remained stable." However, Zelnik and Kantner (1979) say that the proportion of abortions for first pregnancies nearly doubled, with overall abortions of premarital pregnancies rising from thirty-three to forty-five percent. According to the Alan

Guttmacher Institute, nearly three of every ten pregnancies ended in abortion in 1977 and 1978 (AP wireservice, January 6, 1978). Teenagers had one of every three abortions in 1977, and unmarried women had three of every four abortions. The women who obtained abortions in 1977 were mainly "young, white, unmarried, childless." However, United States Department of Commerce statistics indicate that in 1976 the abortion rate for white teenagers was 20.6 and for black teenagers was 43.8. A common myth is that black women have lower abortion rates than do white women, especially among teenagers. If facilities for legal abortions were not available, illegitimacy rates would increase for both groups of teenagers.

Although studies indicate that sexual activity among non-marrieds and especially among teenagers has increased during this century, this conclusion is not proven because the data are not reliable. Whatever the case, it is not possible to attribute the rise in teenage illegitimacy solely to the increase in sexual activity. Baldwin (1976) estimates that the percent of premarital conceptions "legitimized" by marriage has fallen from approximately sixty-five percent to thirty-five percent during 1960 to 1974. Zelnik and Kantner (1979) comment that between 1971 and 1976 the percentage of girls who married after becoming pregnant dropped from fifty-two to thirty-six before delivery and from twelve to nine after delivery. Thus some of the increase in illegitimacy rates can be accounted for by the current pattern of out-of-wedlock pregnancies not being followed by marriage. Research is needed to ascertain both the causes and consequences of this significant social change--the refusal to marry solely because of a pregnancy.

Once a baby is born out of wedlock, the teenage mother has an option to keep the infant or to place it with an adoption agency. Until the 1970's, sixty-four percent of white unwed mothers placed the baby for adoption,

while only six and four-tenths percent of blacks did so (Cutright, 1972). Eighty percent of the nonwhite teenage mothers and sixty percent of the white teenage mothers were poor, so for white girls adoption represented a solution to the double problem of an out-of-wedlock infant and poverty. The reasons blacks did not give their babies for adoption are not absolutely clear, but in any case there would not have been nor are there now many couples who wish to adopt a black infant or a "racially-mixed" infant. During the decade of the 1970's, there has been a change in the attitude of white unwed mothers. They are no longer willing to place their infants for adoption. Zelnik and Kantner (1979) have found that all but seven percent choose to keep their babies. Thus many white teenagers choose not to abort; today they usually do not want to marry the father of the baby, and they wish to keep the baby rather than place the infant for adoption. While neither white society nor black society condones illegitimate births, both groups appear to have adopted a position of moral neutrality towards illegitimacy.

THEORETICAL EXPLANATIONS OF ILLEGITIMACY

Socio-cultural Theories

Illegitimacy exists because the norm of legitimacy exists. This truism has been elevated by Malinowski to the status of a cultural universal, the Principle of Legitimacy. The Principle of Legitimacy, according to Goode (1964), is that "no child should be brought into the world without a man--and one man at that--assuming the role of sociological father." Modern theorists have had ambivalent attitudes towards the norm of legitimacy, both recognizing that the stigma of illegitimacy affects innocent people and yet believing that the norm is a necessary cultural universal. Kingsley Davis

(1939) asserts that it would be simple to eliminate illegitimacy: contraception and abortion could be made available to all unmarried women, or marriage and the family could be eliminated (a "solution" sometimes advocated by utopians). A defense of the Principle of Legitimacy rests on the belief that it serves a universal function. Modern sociologists have tended to identify this function as socialization, although both Malinowski and Goode stress the primacy of the social-placement function. Child-bearing is legitimized by marriage with the marriage placing the child within a kinship structure. Because in folk societies the kinship structure is virtually concomitant with the social structure, the reciprocal rights and obligations of the child within the community are defined. Without this kinship placement, the child is literally "no one" with no "legal" relationship with anyone. The child is likely to be inadequately socialized, and, therefore, the relationship between the child and the community social system is nebulous. Thus illegitimacy means almost literal social disorganization.

European statistics over a 200 year period indicate that in some countries illegitimacy rates are high and that they were at least as high one and two centuries ago (Goode, 1961). However, much of this illegitimacy was only "legal" and did not represent "real" social illegitimacy. The common pattern in rural areas was that youth were permitted to have premarital intercourse within a small circle of eligible marital partners. When pregnancy occurred, marriage followed. Formal marriage might or might not precede the birth; date of legal marriage was strictly a formality. There was no hurry because there was no problem. Living in relatively isolated communities, young people were under close control of parents and communities. Sex was accepted as a natural part of life, and in this self-contained

social system, there was no problem of illegitimacy. A formal marriage was a part of the system, but social marriage did not require a legal marriage. Legal statistics about illegitimacy did rise as collection systems improved, but this did not indicate that this pattern represented illegitimacy in the social sense in rural areas. The pattern of premarital sexual activity, premarital conception, and premarital births has remained among the European working class in urban areas, where in some cases it might constitute "real" illegitimacy. This explanation, which is literally an explaining-away of illegitimacy, might have had some applicability in the United States, especially in the case of the blacks in the rural South. That is to say, in the past illegitimacy among blacks may have been more "legal" than "real."

Another explanation of illegitimacy in Europe is that it developed as a consequence of the population's mobility, which resulted from industrialization and urbanization (Wimperis, 1960). Illegitimacy increased because young adults were removed from the control of their families and communities. The individual who is selling his individual labor in the market place is no longer bound by the control of the kin network. As the new industrial society stabilized, illegitimacy rates decreased but rose again during World Wars I and II. During these wars conditions created much mobility, removing women from the control of family and community and exposing them to men who were not bound by a local community's norms of responsibility toward a woman and her child. Demographic theories still posit mobility of the population as a correlate of illegitimacy, especially in the United States. Also, demographic models de-emphasize the idea that personality characteristics cause individual deviant behavior, but rather explain illegitimacy as external factors impinging on categories of individuals (Freshnook and Cutright,

1979). On the other hand, precisely because mobility has been and is ubiquitous in the United States, it is not an adequate explanation of the increase in the illegitimacy rate nor of the increase in the rate of births to teenage unwed mothers. Further, the demographic models provide only correlated variables of illegitimacy and provide few clues as to cause and hence to possible preventive measures.

In urbanizing Africa, Latin America, and black communities in the southern United States, illegitimacy rates have been high for some time. According to Goode (1961), in these regions acculturation of the minority group (whether that group be the indigenous population, people imported as laborers, or a group developed out of a mixture of populations) is not rewarded with assimilation into the dominant group. Because the minority community has no economic, social, or political sanctions at its disposal, it cannot enforce its cultural norms. Therefore, a type of anomie develops, leaving the minority population bereft of firm commitment to either set of norms. Among them, then, marriage and legitimacy have some prestige, but they are unnecessary for acceptance into the social group. As a corollary, no stigma is attached to the unwed mother or the illegitimate child. In this theory it is not the individuals who are deviant, nor even the family, but rather illegitimacy occurs because of lack of community integration of institutions. This theory has the additional benefit of providing a nonracist explanation of differential illegitimacy rates between races and provides the expectation that illegitimacy rates among blacks in the United States will decrease insofar as social assimilation occurs.

The "culture of poverty" thesis might seem at first glance to be merely a less theoretically sophisticated version of Goode's community anomie

theory; however, the difference between them is significant. This thesis is that the poor have different values and norms from the nonpoor and these different norms include sexual permissiveness, consensual unions as acceptable, and a tolerance of illegitimacy (Lewis, 1966). Because it is a culture, children are socialized by adults to adopt these same patterns, which results in their remaining poor. The culture of poverty theory has been extensively criticized (Valentine, 1968) as being tautological, and the theorists have been rapped for "blaming the victim."

Psychological Theory

Until recently, psychological theories about illegitimacy have been based on the clinical experiences of psychiatrists, social workers, and psychologists. Their experiences have rested on individual case histories, especially with girls of the white middle class, and their theoretical perspective has been psychoanalytic in nature. Thus unwed motherhood has been seen as a symptom of emotional disturbance. According to Young (1954), for example, unwed mothers have an unconscious desire to have an illegitimate child. Because of conflicts with one or both parents, the girl is driven to have an illegitimate child in an unconscious effort to punish the parents. The father of the baby might well be a casual acquaintance, with the girl having little or no feeling for him and no wish to marry him. Young further relates that these girls rarely consider using contraceptives and cannot explain their reluctance to do so. The behavior of the girl makes the pregnancy inevitable, indicating the presence of the unconscious intent to have the illegitimate child.

The deficiency of this approach is that it is based on small, selected samples not representative of the majority of unwed mothers (and it is not

believed to be the explanation of illegitimacy among cultural minorities). With the large number of unwed mothers among all social classes, it seems no longer an efficient explanation to ascribe emotional disturbance to most of them. Besides, the high number of abortions makes the theory tenuous. Finally, a large number of young women now keep their babies and seem to find some pride rather than a stigma in doing so.

Those who have written about illegitimacy from a psychoanalytic point of view deserve credit in that they have attempted to make a sympathetic case for the unwed mother and her infant. Thus the mother is seen as a victim, usually of unfortunate familial circumstances, and, of course, the infant is even more of a victim. These authors have stressed that the mother is not intentionally immoral and that illegitimacy is not limited to the poor and ignorant. The theory lacks validity, however, when it too universally ascribes purpose (even though unconscious) to the illegitimate pregnancy as well as emotional disturbance as the background, and, consequently, the theorists have stressed the need for treatment rather than prevention. It is strange that despite the Freudian intellectual ancestry of this theoretical approach, sexual desire is treated as if it does not exist, especially among women. The authors have made no assumption that sex drives are normal, and when the girl has broken two taboos by having premarital sexual intercourse and by having an illegitimate baby, she is seen as obviously having poor emotional health. With the large numbers of unmarried girls and young women having premarital sex and becoming pregnant, it should be better to base preventive measures on theories of normal psychosexual development rather than on aberrant development.

TEENAGE ILLEGITIMACY: TOWARDS A THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE

The following features now characterize illegitimacy:

1. Almost half of illegitimate births are to teenagers.

2. It occurs among very young girls (age fifteen and below) in large enough numbers to be a cause of concern.

3. Over ninety percent of teenage mothers with illegitimate infants keep their babies rather than give them up for adoption.

4. These mothers experience pregnancy without abortion even when it is available.

5. Girls who do abort get pregnant again unless there is the intervention of sex education and counseling.

6. Morbidity and mortality are quite high for the infants, in the former case resulting in later problems for society (children with mental retardation and epilepsy, for example).

7. Morbidity and mortality are higher for the young mothers than for physically more mature mothers.

8. The age of the mother makes it psychologically and economically difficult for her to care for her infant.

Because of the changing patterns of illegitimacy in the United States in recent years, past theories of illegitimacy are no longer sufficient. Former theories seem to have assumed that the mothers were women--young women but still women--chronologically, physically, and cognitively. Most females having illegitimate babies in the United States today are not "women." They are teenagers, often very young teenagers, themselves often still children. Judging from the high morbidity and mortality statistics regarding both mother and infant, we now know that many of these mothers are

not even physically mature, which makes us wonder if they are also not psychologically, that is, cognitively and morally, immature.

Teenage girls have been put in a vulnerable position. An unanticipated consequence of the sexual revolution is the early sexual activity of many teenagers. Today sexual activity is accepted throughout society and especially presented in the mass media as permissible, good, and even status-enhancing. These permissive sex norms among teenagers co-exist with widespread ignorance about sex and birth control, which is a result of a cultural lag: the girls are not presented with knowledge about sex until much later. (This is more true for blacks than for whites.) In this urban, post-industrial society, girls do not have the adult supervision that would make sexual intercourse and, therefore, pregnancy less likely. As will be discussed later, this freedom assumes a type of moral control beyond their psychological maturity.

As a result of the technological revolution, the age of puberty has decreased by as much as four years. Girls are now entering puberty as early as age eleven, or even younger in some cases. Although fecund, the girl's body may not be mature enough for her to bear a child without risk to her and the infant's health. Although legal abortion is available and is widely used, many teenage girls do not resort to it. The idea seems to have developed among teenagers that it is good for the mother to keep the child, apparently out of a romanticized notion of parenthood.

The young mothers' bearing and attempted caring for illegitimate infants must be placed in a socio-historical context. Early childbearing itself would not necessarily be a great problem in a preindustrial, agricultural society with an extended kinship network. For example, very early marriage

and early childbearing in India was not a social problem because living in a joint family system insured the proper care of the young parents and the infant. Also, in the rural Southern United States, illegitimate births were not a significant social problem, because the extended kin network would readily absorb the mother and child. Childbearing by teenage mothers can be and should be considered a social problem in an urban, post-industrial society with a nuclear family system.

In American society, the local community (to the extent that such exists) lacks cohesion, and it has few means to supervise, protect, and control the behavior of the young. The nuclear family is isolated, and the young are not under the surveillance and control of an extended kin network. While the isolated nuclear family is often criticized, it is seldom supported by the community in its child-rearing functions. Therefore, it follows that the weakness of this small unit is not a moral weakness; it is a structural one. The teenage peer group has been castigated by social critics because it maintains too much control over its members, yet it is a group not structurally linked to other social institutions. Even in school, the peer group's role seems to be more challenging than cooperative. Adults treat the youth as a child but expect her to act as an adult. The lack of recognition and responsibility from social institutions, including the family, influences them to turn toward the peer group, and many teenage peer groups, including those of girls, are apparently promoting sexual activity as a means of gaining recognition and status among each other. Like the "gamines" in Latin American cities, American teenagers seem abandoned by family and community. They live on the fringes of a society that seems simultaneously uninterested, amused, puzzled, threatened, and hostile to them.

There is a dissensus among members of the society regarding norms of sexual behavior. Sexual activity before marriage, explicitly including sexual intercourse, is presented in the mass media as typical, desirable behavior. Also, the model of femininity in the media has changed during the past two generations from a sexually innocent girl to a sexually active and sexually aggressive young woman. However, romanticism has not declined; illegitimate babies rarely appear as consequences of sex on television situation comedies. The inexorable media message that "sex is good, and everybody's doing it!" cannot be easily countered by a society divided about "what is good?" and "for whom?"

For all the above reasons, no accounting for the current character of illegitimacy can be adequate without incorporating the theory of the development and acquisition of moral values in children and adolescents. Kohlberg's theory (1963, 1969) implies that neither early sex education nor the availability of abortion and contraceptive techniques will alone reduce illegitimacy. These young women are really children--maturing children but still children--and they are being confronted with decisions to make when they lack the capacity to do so. They are having illegitimate babies and keeping them because they are cognitively and morally immature and do not possess the ability to recognize the consequences of the decisions that they make. These girls are not necessarily emotionally disturbed; they are merely young.

Furthermore, Kohlberg maintains that children develop moral values in progressively more mature stages as they grow, each level representing a reintegration of knowledge, social awareness, and changes in moral judgments. Because these stages require organism maturation, one cannot teach a given

level of moral judgment to one too immature to assimilate it. Also, children often have cognitive awareness and internalize moral principles before they are able to act accordingly.

Teenagers are well aware of the relativity of social norms regarding premarital sexual behavior in our society. They are able to articulate expectations that sexually active people should be responsible for themselves and others with whom they become sexually involved. However, the very fact that they usually fail to use contraceptives is in itself evidence of the discrepancy between expressed norms and behavior (Daniel, 1977). The evidence obtained by Hatcher (1972) illustrates the utility of a developmental approach. She has found that the very young pregnant girl often denies the pregnancy even into the third trimester and usually blames parents, church, and the boy for the pregnancy. Their concept of the fetus is childish: they depict it with stick figures. These girls need to be closely supervised if they are to take adequate care of themselves. Ambivalence is the key word to describe unwed mothers in middle adolescence. The girls continue to refuse to accept responsibility for the pregnancies, but the picture drawings of the infants are clear, and they have some feelings of pride about the maturity and independence that they think the pregnancies demonstrate. It is mainly the late adolescent girls who accept their responsibility for the pregnancies, and often request abortion because they believe they cannot cope with the pregnancies nor care for the infants.

It follows from Kohlberg, then, that teaching of moral sex norms can lead to verbal conformity to the rules without necessarily leading to the capacity to make moral judgments. Excessive coercion may result in fixation at an early stage of moral reasoning at which rules are absolute and avoidance

of punishment is the goal; paradoxically, therefore, breaking the rules may be a part of adolescent rebellion in an attempt to demonstrate adult independence. Because moral reasoning is related to ego development, assisting the child to think "prudently" and assisting her to develop more mature moral reasoning by providing her with ego-developing experiences, would be more useful than warning, blaming, or ignoring her. These ego-enhancing experiences help promote senses of self and the social order, and moral conceptions of one's responsibilities in the social world.

CONCLUSIONS

Society has considered middle-class illegitimacy as stemming from individual deviant sexual behavior, and it has considered illegitimacy among the poor and among minorities as stemming from a deviant subculture, which was not cause for concern by middle class citizenry. It is only belatedly that professionals and the public are being alert to the dimensions and implications of illegitimacy among teenagers.

Viewing illegitimacy from an individualist, deviant behavior frame of reference has not been useful since the prevalence of illegitimacy is very high. Theories which are based on the belief that illegitimacy occurs because of social marginality of subcultures are inadequate to explain illegitimacy among the children of working class and middle class parents. Theories which are based on the idea that mothers of illegitimate infants are mature women, capable of calculating the long term consequences of their actions are not valid explanations of illegitimacy among teenagers.

This analysis indicates that pregnancy is occurring among teenagers not because they choose to be deviants but because socio-cultural factors pressure them into making decisions that require a more mature level of

moral judgment than they possess. Current programs are designed to treat symptoms rather than causes of teenage pregnancies. The theories suggest that sex education classes and the availability of contraception and abortion will be ineffective without taking into account levels of cognitive and moral development of the teenager. In fact, sex education without moral guidance is tacitly permissive.

Theories of illegitimacy applicable to teenagers should be theories based on normal psychosocial development of adolescents in the context of a heterogeneous society which gives teenagers extraordinary amounts of personal freedom and a society which has been developing a hedonistic attitude toward sexual activity. An adequate theory of illegitimacy would include socialization experiences for persons at a given level of cognitive and moral development in the context of a society with certain values. This type of approach was classically exemplified by McClelland (1953, 1961) in his work regarding the achievement motive, the difference now being that there is more knowledge about cognitive development at the present time. Preventive measures regarding illegitimacy based on such theories would be more adequate than present approaches which are not based on theory at all.

In summary, as the lack of physical development of the teenage mother means that morbidity and mortality of mother and child are high, so does the immature psychological development indicate that it is not possible for the girl to make more mature decisions about sex and pregnancy. Unwed teenagers bearing infants and keeping their infants when they cannot adequately care for them is producing a problem of significant dimensions for society. This problem cannot be usefully addressed without a more adequate theory of illegitimacy to guide policy makers and clinicians.

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